

March 19, 1976

Mr. Sidney King
RFD 1, Box 102
Milford, VA. 22514

Dear Mr. King:

This letter will serve to amplify the description of the painting listed in our purchase order as "(2) Chesterville Plantation house". This residence of George Wythe was built by him in the early 1770's on his family plantation. The only available photograph of the house (enclosed) was taken in 1908, only three years before it burned. At that time its attractive flemish bond brick work had been covered with stucco and the woodwork, shutters, etc. had been allowed to become dilapidated. In addition, the photo only shows a front view of the house, minus the roof and chimney, and the front door is shown in a location inconsistent with that of colonial buildings. Because of these limitations of the photo, our LRC Historical and Archeological Society members have researched contemporary designs for supplementary data and have produced the conjectural line drawing shown in the enclosed copy of the Society's seal. It is this representation that we feel is the most valid indicator of the early appearance of this house that we wish to portray in your painting. We know that some outbuildings were associated with the house, one of which partially shows in the photograph. One of these was a seventeenth century residence which was used as slave quarters for many years. Archeological evidence shows that it was a long narrow frame house on a stone foundation which was oriented at right angles to the main house, being located to its rear and slightly to the right, as view from the front. Other outbuildings such as dairy and smokehouse were probably of frame construction built on stone or brick footings, but their location is unknown at the present time. However, some indication of their presence is probably necessary to provide an acceptable context for the house.

The house faced south and was surrounded by a grove of large old trees, two of which still survive at the right front of the house (southeast corner). They are an elm and a hackberry, and the others were probably of the same type. Also, willow oaks are a proven common shade tree for colonial houses in this area. The enclosed map shows the relationship of the house to the Wythe Creek to its north and its associated salt marsh which provide the backdrop for its setting. Since sailing vessels were known to dock at the plantation wharf to load tobacco and grain, some indication of this presence would be appropriate. The enclosed photograph of the area taken a few years ago might be of some help in setting the scene. A well, probably in a well house, was near the southwest corner of the house, some twenty feet from it. This would be to the left of the large tree shown at the far left of the photograph. The drive to the house came directly from the south, probably ending in a circle.

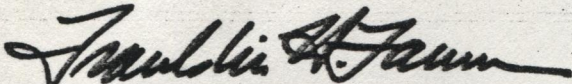
The dimensions of the house were 30' wide x 30' high (to roof line) x 53' deep. The "english basement" had sufficient height to allow head clearance for most men. It is reported to have had large doors on each side which allowed it to be used for wagon and carriage storage. The enclosed drawings of the main and second floors were based on the memory of a local octogenarian who visited the house often during the first decade of the century. Although we think the hall in the main floor plan was a nineteenth century afterthought, the window placement was probably not effected by the later changes. A 1781 sketch of the house shows a small landing in front of the middle arch with stairs coming up both sides. This structure was probably of wood as no indication of brick steps survive. It is not shown on the line drawing because the sketch was discovered after the drawing had been made. The only other feature indicated by the sketch, which is very crude, is a chimney on the east side of the house. This chimney may have been associated with a wooden kitchen added on the back of the house, as our informant could not remember where it was located.

The side openings on the porch were most probably arches instead of windows as shown on the main floor plan. An example of the orientation of the side arch and the second floor window above can be seen in a copy of a photo of the Middlesex County courthouse, built circa 1847, which may have been copied from the design of "Chesterville". The semi-circular window shown in the gable of the courthouse was evidently preferred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and should be used rather than the square one shown in the photo and line drawing.

In spite of the seemingly large amount of data on the house and its surroundings, we have been searching diligently for an earlier photo of it. If we should uncover one in the next few weeks I will call you immediately, and we can discuss any changes that still might be made at that late date.

I hope that this information will be helpful to you in your execution of our painting. If additional information is needed, please call me at 804-827-3066 during the day or 804-642-5875 in the evenings.

Very sincerely yours,



Franklin H. Farmer
Co-Chairman, LRC Bicentennial
Committee
President, LRC Historical and
Archeological Society